

Anderson Area Shrinkdown Boosts Healthy Eating and Physical Activity

Issue

Lifestyle modification can decrease the risk and burden of chronic disease. But it's hard to do alone. When a group of Anderson area residents came together, they were startled to realize that they needed to potentially lose a combined total of thousands of pounds.

A lack of physical activity and unhealthy eating can lead to obesity and chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, obesity is quickly approaching cigarette smoking as the number one cause of preventable death in the United States. Results from the 2002 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System are as follows:

- Less than 25 percent of South Carolinians consume the recommended five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily.
- Almost 55 percent of SC adults are either inactive or do not meet the minimum amount of physical activity recommended for better health.
- Over 64 percent of SC adults are overweight or obese.
- South Carolina experienced over \$1 billion in obesity-attributable medical expenditures in 2003.

Intervention

The Anderson Area Shrinkdown is a healthy living initiative sponsored by numerous community organizations, including the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, thanks to Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant dollars. Spearheaded by the Anderson Area YMCA, the program strives to lead the citizens of Anderson County to a healthier lifestyle. The Anderson Area Shrinkdown is a free, eight-week program encouraging people to start eating healthy and exercising so that they can shed unwanted pounds. This year's Shrinkdown included the following initiatives:

- Pedometers were provided to all participants so that they could keep track of the number of steps they were taking each day;
- A Healthy Living Guide was given to all participants on Kickoff day, which was full of current information on healthy eating and exercise;
- Weekly weigh-ins were held at convenient locations throughout the county so participants could keep track of their weight loss; and
- Weekly health talks on a variety of topics, led by local health professionals, helped participants learn about the importance of healthy lifestyle changes and how to stay on the road to success.

Impact

Over 4,600 Anderson residents registered for the Shrinkdown at the Kickoff Event and by the end of the eight weeks, over 14,000 pounds had been lost by the participants. These phenomenal numbers helped to make the Anderson Area Shrinkdown the most successful in the state, exceeding all other 13 participating YMCA programs in South Carolina. Renee King, Wellness Director for the Anderson YMCA, said it best, "We can't promise that 'in eight weeks, you'll have a better body and drop 50 pounds.' It's a lifestyle change, but we're holding your hand through first eight weeks, hoping you'll stick to the changes throughout the year and hopefully for the rest of your life."

Building upon the success of the first Shrinkdown, plans are already underway for a year-round program for 2008 with an increased focus on lifestyle change, and encouraging kids to make healthy choices.

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